

monitoring report

Elections B&H '96

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THE B&H MEDIA WEEK IN REVIEW: 1-7 JULY

Mostar and Karadžić continued to dominate last week's media agenda: the former because of elections which took place, the latter because of a candidacy which will not. The third big election-related story, the registration of party lists for the 14 September poll, trailed far behind in terms of air time and column inches.

We concentrate this week both on reactions to the Mostar vote and on television news in Republika Srpska. We also provide a summary of the main networks' own recently issued rules for covering the campaign.

Mostar United or Divided

Radio-Television Mostar's "Dnevnik" reacted with considerable restraint to the victory of the List for a United Mostar in the 30 June elections. Unlike Croatian Television Mostar (see below), it neither gloated nor made improbable statements on the basis of the unofficial results. It confined itself on 2 July to citing official communiques and the congratulatory messages of leading politicians, almost as if it expected that problems might soon arise in the confirmation of the figures.

It was clear, however, that the station shared the happy reaction of the citizens it interviewed in the streets of east Mostar. It also announced that there would be a fireworks display that night, but without explaining why. That would have been redundant.

Rather than polemicise with the Croats, the station's editor-in-chief, Alija Behram, attacked SDP leader Nijaz Duraković for suggesting that *Mostarci* had taken part in a national census rather than an election. Although holding fast to

the line that the election represented, above all, a victory for a united city, it was nonetheless possible to discern a tendency to ascribe the success to the SDA.

News of the polling irregularity in Bonn was broadcast on 3 July, but without any commentary. Full reports on the decision by the City Electoral Commission to nullify the elections in Bonn followed the next day. Mayor Safet Oručević appeared now for the first time to stress that the verdict of the election ombudsman would be respected. TV Mostar continued to refrain from offering its own editorial comment.

Only on 5 July did "Dnevnik" enter the fray as an interested party, but confined itself still to airing the views of official sources. For example, it quoted Federation arbitrator Christian Schwarz Schilling to the effect that what had happened in Bonn was "a simple bureaucratic error". It also yielded to the triumphalist temptation of airing Oručević's speech that day in which he hailed *Mostarci* for forming "a division of 28-30,000 people" who had vanquished all attempts to fragment them.

The ombudsman's decision on 6 July to confirm the election results was conveyed calmly and without euphoria. Thus, despite what was at least a conditional victory for the united Mostar option, RTV Mostar managed during the week to keep its professional feet on the ground and to do its job.

Matters were different on the west side of the city. **Croatian Television Mostar** attempted from the start to interpret the figures as other than they were or less than they seemed. On 1 July West Mostar mayor and HDZ standard-bearer Mijo Brajković was present in the studio with his

campaign chairman, Srećko Vučina, to make their excuses and spread the blame. The European Union, Brajković claimed, "had carried out some machinations" which both he and the presenter apparently thought so obvious that they did not need to be explained to viewers. Journalists were also at fault for having come to Mostar expecting to see conflicts and sensations, a proposition also readily accepted by that evening's presenter.

Responding to her helpful observation that the HDZ had at least won more votes than any other single party, Vučina, for his part, drew the following mathematical conclusion: "If the HDZ received 26,000 votes, it won them by itself, whereas the List for a United Mostar, composed of four parties, gained 28,000. That means that, on average, each of them received only 7,000."

At the end of their appearance (which had occupied most of "Dnevnik"'s air time), Brajković promised to do what he could to enlarge the programme's audience.

The 2 July newscast continued in the same vein, with the presenter announcing that, "as expected, the HDZ had won convincingly in the Croatian municipality of Mostar while the SDA, which had appeared on this occasion under the name of the List for a United Mostar, had won in the Muslim municipality." He went on to comment as follows: "The Croatian nation and its movement (or party, if you prefer), the HDZ, has by its maturity ensured the foundation, in consonance with the Dayton agreement, of three Croatian councils and, thereby, their national, cultural and religious identity."

In other words, as far as HTV Mostar was concerned, the elections signified the city's division. Thus in another commentary it was noted that the "rejoicing of the Muslim authorities and populace is typically unfounded and unjustified, like so often before, especially because, according to unofficial data, the SDA has only about 1,700 more votes than the HDZ, and that means nothing." The lesson in mathematics continued when the previous evening's performance by Brajković and Vučina was repeated in full after "Dnevnik".

The news from Bonn was not only welcomed on 3 July, it was taken to mean that there would certainly be new elections in the German city. The decision of the City Election Commission to nullify the Bonn vote reinforced this expectation on 4 July. When the contrary verdict of Ombudsman Konstantin Zepos was made known on 7 July the

indignation on HTV Mostar was all the greater. Yet the pretence that "our HDZ" had indeed won the elections was maintained throughout.

Croatian Television's portrayal of a HDZ victory in Mostar was marginally more subtle. On 2 July "Dnevnik" carried a clip in which HDZ B&H chief Božo Rajić, emerging from a reception hosted by President Tuđman, claimed a moral victory "because all the other parties were united against us." Brajković, appearing the next day, explained that Croats had been the victims of many irregularities, of which the apparent case of ballot box stuffing in Bonn was but one example.

Mostar in the Press

The Sarajevo press maintained its extensive coverage both of the election campaign in general and of the Mostar results in particular during the past week. Nearly 50 per cent of the election-related articles and news items appearing in the newspapers were devoted to the Mostar poll, although interest faded in mid-week as the various parties' lists of candidates for the B&H-wide elections in September were announced.

Oslobođenje published 74 pieces on the elections in the week 1-7 July, 31 of which related to Mostar. *Večernje novine* carried 78 articles, 55 of which concerned the Mostar poll. While 28 of *Dnevni Avaz's* 75 articles on the campaign were devoted to Mostar. Of the three dailies, only *Večernje novine's* total increased in comparison to the week 24-30 June.

The weeklies also provided considerable space for the Mostar vote: *Svijet* publishing six pieces, *Ljiljan* five, and *Hrvatska riječ* seven.

Commentaries on the Mostar results

As far as domestic political parties, the B&H media and the relevant international institutions were concerned, the Mostar elections had been expected to be significant both as a trial run for the September poll and as a test of the process of forming new, democratically-based governments. Now, after the elections, it seems obvious that such expectations were exaggerated, and that these local elections had a predominantly local significance.

The first unofficial results showed that the List for a United Mostar had won 48 per cent of the votes, the HDZ 45 per cent and the Associated List of five opposition parties three per cent. The

remaining lists and independent candidates won scarcely one per cent or less.

These results produced enthusiasm on the part of the SDA and its coalition partners: the Party for B&H, the Liberal Bošnjak Organisation and the Serbian Civic Council, that is, among those favouring both a united B&H and a united Mostar. Safet Oručević, writing as leader of the victorious List for a United Mostar to the city's citizens, offered his congratulations "on the great electoral victory which we have won together for the common ideal of a united Mostar."

All three Sarajevo newspapers endorsed the view that the Mostar result was a great victory, registering it with huge front-page headlines and filling many inside pages. *Večernje novine's* front-page banner, using the party leaders' nicknames, proclaimed "Safa 48%, Mijo 45%..." and in one article wrote, "On the left bank of the Neretva the victory of Mostar was welcomed with embraces, tears of joy and undisguised popular faith in a better future." In another article the paper noted, however, that, "The first results were greeted on the west side of the city with disbelief because much more had been expected of the HDZ B&H."

For its part, *Oslobođenje* wrote, "The basic emotion after the elections was satisfaction among both citizens and politicians, domestic and foreign." "Even Ambassador Steiner," according to *Oslobođenje*, was "encouraged"; and "the victory of the List of Citizens for a United Mostar was a victory for understanding and truth." Another article proclaimed that "*Mostarci* themselves had majestically and convincingly defeated the idea of 'a Croatian capital city,' as well as the notion of a divided Mostar of enforced ethnic units created by sowing fear of all togetherness, which the Croat leaders in the city had described as 'despicable Yugoslavism'."

Dnevni Avaz announced the election results under an enormous headline, "The wall is destroyed", and informed Croats in particular that the List for a United Mostar had won because the HDZ "had made its plans without consulting those most concerned." *Avaz* also carried Oručević's open letter congratulating citizens on their victory.

The leaders of the opposition parties which had not joined in the SDA-led coalition either showed restraint or took the opportunity to make bitter remarks about the ruling parties. Zlatko Lagumdžija congratulated the victors in the name of the Associated List, but reserved special praise for its own candidates. He also noted that the

SDA and HDZ had been secret allies in seeking to maintain their positions and to divide power in Mostar.

Republican Party chief Stjepan Klujić announced that the winners in Mostar were the parties which had fought a war to divide the city. He added that, "had the political will been there, Mostar would have been reunited without elections." Mujo Kafedžić, vice-president of the MBO, said that the elections showed that political forces which did not dispose of armed might would find it difficult to come to power because they were exposed to the violence of others.

Josip Jole Musa, leader of the Associated List, commented that "the people will see who has won and who has lost... I expected something better, nothing outstanding, much less than the speculation, but better than this."

Foreign observers - representatives of the EU, OSCE and OHR - did not hide their satisfaction that the elections had proceeded in an orderly and peaceful fashion. Their relief was best expressed by Michael Steiner: "The Mostar elections have succeeded without any doubt, both for Mostar and for the European administration."

HDZ reactions to and commentaries on the elections were carried by *Hrvatska riječ*. In a detailed analysis of the campaign and results the paper accused HDZ activists of having been insufficiently agile and of having failed to get all would-be HDZ voters to the polls. The vote was not, however, seen as a defeat, but rather as a disappointment without any great importance. HDZ standard-bearer and west Mostar Mayor Mijo Brajković contended that the HDZ had received tremendous support from Croat voters. Indeed, *Hrvatska riječ's* banner headline announcing the results proclaimed, "Finally and officially, Mostar Croats have their own municipality".

Inside, the paper's commentators were more candid: "Mostar's elections were about the predominance of lists representing two national blocs. One was created by the Muslims and the other by the HDZ... An appreciable number of Mostar Croats failed to go to the polls, and in that lay the key to the victory of Safet Oručević's list... The Bošnjak side, represented at these elections by an SDA which packaged itself as a civic coalition, skilfully camouflaged itself with flowery slogans like 'Mostar for the Mostarci', 'For a united city' etc."

Some shadows fell on the elections. The Election Commission nullified the votes cast in Bonn, only

to have its decision overturned by the ombudsman, Konstantin Zepos, within a few days of the poll. Because of this contretemps, no final and official figures had been released one week after the vote.

The second shadow was the absence of Mostar Serbs from the elections. Attempts to open polling places in Belgrade and Nevesinje remained just that. All the more important parties in the conduct of the elections ignored this question, both before and after the vote. This might be interpreted as silent acceptance of the reality of ethnic cleansing.

A third shadow follows to the extent that the Mostar elections are indeed a trial run for September. If so, then there will be no reason to expect any surprises or changes in the current political constellation.

TV Srpska

A Week in the Life of "Novosti u 8"

Radovan Karadžić still has no competition as the dominant figure on this newscast. He appeared directly every day as SDS president, including the delivery of an important policy speech at the three-day meeting of the party's Main Board (1-3 July). He laid most stress in this address on the forthcoming elections: "If the body of Serb voters is divided this time, then we will be in danger of again having to defend with guns the freedom and statehood that we have won." His rejection of the Main Board's unanimous insistence that he should defy international pressure and run in the elections did not alter the fact that he - and not Biljana Plavšić - remains in control. For he did accept re-election as SDS president.

Expressions of support from certain international figures and media are carefully selected by "Novosti u 8" to reinforce Karadžić's authority and charisma, whether in regard to the possible reimposition of economic sanctions on RS or the proceedings of The Hague Tribunal. In the latter case, an ANSA report was quoted on 2 July to the effect that the Tribunal had been "forced to acknowledge that it had no written evidence against Radovan Karadžić."

The intensive talks held by Carl Bildt in Pale and by Biljana Plavšić in Belgrade resolved temporarily the dilemma of whether or not Karadžić was still president of RS, but his retention of the SDS presidency perpetuated his party's conflict with both the international community and the Sarajevo

government. The OSCE Appeals Sub-Commission must now rule on whether the SDS will be allowed to participate in the elections at all.

The announcement that the party's candidates are to be Biljana Plavšić, Momčilo Krajišnik, Aleksa Buha and Dragoljub Mirjanić was proof of the pressure on Karadžić. All the expressions of support from the world and from right-wing Serb parties chronicled by "Novosti u 8" did not help. As explained by Krajišnik on 4 July, "The people must know that the non-candidacy of President Radovan Karadžić is a consequence of the international community's pressure." A commentary by Milan Pribić broadcast the same day attacked the said "community" with particular virulence.

TV Srpska continued however to refer to Plavšić as "vice-president" in its newscasts of 5 and 6 July, thereby implying that Karadžić's final political fate remained to be determined, in the first place by the Appeals Sub-Commission. On the other hand, Bildt's statement to Reuters on 7 July that the power of Karadžić' and Mladić is being "unnecessarily exaggerated" went unmentioned by TV Srpska.

Although constantly stressing its thesis that the international community (IFOR, The Hague Tribunal, OSCE, etc.) has conspired against Republika Srpska and its leadership, "Novosti u 8" continues to reserve special scorn for "Muslims" and the "Croat-Muslim" federation. No opportunity is missed to criticize and castigate them. Compensation for domestic political tensions is found by insisting on the existence of a permanent crisis in the Federation and on constant conflicts between "Muslims" and Croats.

Tensions are built up in various ways. The confrontation between IFOR soldiers and the "Serb population" which took place during a recent IFOR action near Han Pijesak was reported in highly dramatic terms on 6 July, as had IFOR's "close encounter" with RS army officers near the settlement of Brod on the Drina the previous day, following which Mladić sent a sharp protest to IFOR. Tensions within the Federation were highlighted in the cases of friction between Muslims and Croats in Bugojno (3 July), political mistrust in Mostar (1-2 July) and the controversy over the adoption of a federal defence law. The clash between Serbs and Bošnjaks on the newly opened bridge on the Usora river which took place during a Bošnjak attempt to enter Doboj offered much scope for underlining Serb-Muslim enmity (5 July).

Election topics appear most often in the form of reports on citizen interest in the elections and the verification of voters' lists in various places. The week's biggest election item, however, appeared on 7 July, when a detailed survey of the parties and candidates (both from RS and the Federation) that have registered for the elections in RS was broadcast. This was typographically clear, with exact names being cited. It was also most comprehensive information which "Novosti u 8" has so far provided about parties other than the SDS. At the end of the same broadcast, all political parties were invited to take part in a programme about the elections to be aired the very next day (8 July).

The news in context

Although the most important political event of the week in RS was undoubtedly the SDS Main Board session, other "state" activities were covered attentively, providing evidence that the government is functioning normally and in the interest of the Serb people. Biljana Plavšić's activities came into the foreground: proof that she has taken over "power", even if the three-day session of the SDS Main Board showed otherwise. Economic and social topics (reconstruction and care for refugees) were another frequent topic for reports.

The security situation was highlighted in reports of the agreement on inter-entity boundaries signed in the presence of Admiral Leighton Smith on 6 July. The Serb side's interpretation differed from those of Smith and the Bošnjaks. The broadcast item failed to quote Smith as saying that these are only administrative lines, nor his declaration that "We will never accept that the inter-entity line becomes a border" (as reported by "Oko 22" on NTV Studio 99 the same day). The incident on the Usora river crossing reinforced the Serbs' opposite view.

Linguistic notes

The stance of "Novosti u 8" towards both the "other entity" (especially Muslims) and the international community continues to be characterised by "hard" talk and unpleasant terminology. The Federation remains a "Muslim-Croat" arrangement and "a dead letter" within which the Croats are pursuing "their separatist policy". The future B&H is referred to as the "Union of Republika Srpska and the Croat-Muslim Federation". The clash on the Usora bridge was with "Muslim hordes", "a mob of extremists" and "Muslim journalists" from "balija-land" (ie, with

backward Muslims from the sticks). On 6 July a news item mentioned "the followers of Alija Izetbegović and his terrorist SDA." IFOR peacekeepers are "cosmopolitan soldiers and politicians" and "mercenaries from the multinational anti-Serb coalition" who have come to defend "Muslim inhumanity".

Conclusions

"Novosti u 8" provides unreserved support to Republika Srpska authorities. It fully upholds the policies, ideology and national euphoria propagated by the ruling SDS. Its relentlessly negative stance towards the Federation - and especially towards Muslims - aims to rule out any possibility of coexistence and reintegration.

TV B&H

"Dnevnik"'s 2 July verdict on the Mostar poll was that the victory of the List for a United Mostar would greatly ease preparations for the B&H-wide elections in September. The subsequent revelation that 26 more ballots had been cast in Bonn than there were registered voters made this initial assessment look somewhat facile, but it also provided an opportunity over the next two days for the editorial team to demonstrate their evenhandedness in reporting the conflicting demands of the HDZ (that the Bonn vote be annulled) and the SDA (that it be confirmed).

The submission by parties of their candidate lists to the OSCE's Provisional Electoral Commission on 4 July initiated three days of blanket coverage of party politics by "Dnevnik". Most of the parties submitting lists were allowed to speak for themselves on 4 July; and the programme's previous aversion to party press conferences appeared to have vanished. An extensive bloc was devoted to party platforms on 5 July; while the next day party leaders were invited to discuss the candidacy of Fikret Abdić.

Another item on 6 July was devoted to the drawing of lots for post-"Dnevnik" party political broadcasts. (See below.) The presenter afterwards concluded that it was incumbent upon TV B&H to be completely impartial as between the claims of "daddies, uncles and cousins - or, translated into our language - not to favour Alija, Haris or Krešimir". He had also noted in the same broadcast that many viewers had objected to the report the previous evening of the Bosnian Democratic Party's announcement that Fikret

Abdić would be its candidate for the presidency. He explained, however, that it was TV B&H's duty to impart such news, not to stifle it.

For the first time since monitoring commenced, the "B&H Elections" programme carried on 1 July both a statement by President Izetbegović (on the Mostar elections) and a communique by a party from Republika Srpska (the Social-Liberal Party). Self-promotional items were provided by the Croatian Party of Rights, the Civil Democratic Party and the Party of Economic Prosperity. The opposition boycott appears to be no more. On the other hand, the programme remains professional and impartial.

Last week's "Face to Face" (5 July) provided four opposition party leaders with an opportunity to demonstrate their disunity. The argument began when Zlatko Lagumdžija (SDP) remarked that a victory in September by the nationalist parties would both cause many people to flee B&H and make renewed warfare likely. Rasim Kadić (LS) replied that this was a virtual threat, which caused Lagumdžija, in turn, to accuse Kadić of leading a sectarian party. Joining the fray, Ibrahim Spahić (Civil Democratic Party) expressed regret that so much old and dirty linen should be washed in public.

Election Programme Policy

Radio-Television Bosnia & Hercegovina (RTV B&H) and Srpska Radio-Television (SRT) have adopted rules of conduct to apply in the course of the pre-election and election campaigns.

At first sight, the essence of both sets of rules is to specify equal principles and equal access in the coverage of parties' and independent candidates' election activities. The basic principles mentioned are providing the public with full information, observing the rules of conduct set out by the OSCE's Provisional Election Commission and developing democracy and respect for human rights. Both broadcasters also pledge not to affirm or support those political parties and candidates who denigrate their opponents in the election campaign, let alone use any form of violence or intimidation against other parties during their participation in programmes.

Differences appear in the policies which will determine the conduct of the broadcasters. RTV B&H programme policy is to take into account the "fact that Bosnia & Hercegovina is a democratic, sovereign, and politically and territorially

independent state in which Bošnjaks, Croats and Serbs are both constituent nations (together with others) and citizens". SRT's policy, on the other hand, is to "affirm the sovereignty and integrity of Republika Srpska, determined by the Dayton peace agreement". SRT also declares that it "will not present those political parties and factions whose programmes promote violent change of the constitutionally determined order of Republika Srpska and threaten either its territorial integrity or the degree of independence which it has attained."

Party political broadcasts on RTV B&H are to start on 15 July. Parties and independent candidates will be allotted 10-minute slots both on television (at 20.00 after "Dnevnik") and on radio (at 22.30 after "Hronika dana"). The programme "B&H Elections" (on Mondays from 18.00 to 19.00) will continue to give parties a chance to present themselves in four-minute films.

RTV B&H has also announced a competition for parties to apply to participate in twice-weekly, topic-related broadcasts on both radio and television. Parties have been offered 22 topics, with the schedule of parties and topics to be determined by drawing lots. Five parties will take part in each show. The radio programmes will be aired at 10:05 on Tuesdays (within the "Antenna" show) and at 17.00 on Thursdays (as a part of "Open Studio"). The television broadcasts will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 21.00.

Parties which want to appear have already been given space in which to confront each other and/or exchange ideas on the "Face to Face" programme.

SRT is to start party presentations on 9 July: from 20.35 to 21.50 on television (Tuesdays through Fridays) and from 17.00 to 18.00 on radio (Tuesdays through Thursdays). The parties' order of appearances is to be determined by draw.

Parties registered for the elections at the Republika Srpska level are also to have a chance to take part in radio and television debates on four set topics. Each topic will be debated three times, with up to eight parties taking part. The debates are scheduled to be aired on 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27 and 29 August and on 3, 5, 10 and 12 September.

Media Briefs

NTV Zetel has increased its voter education effort of late. One interesting item features on-screen questions asking "Why vote?", "Who has the right

to vote?" and "What are we voting for?" as an introduction to an information bloc presented by a journalist. The film is graphically sophisticated, extremely informative and stylishly executed. Zetel has also aired a mini-poll of Zenica residents in which they were how much they knew about the lists of candidates. None of the nine polled knew the names of the candidates in the forthcoming elections. It seems Zetel has its work cut out for it.

Under the tutelage of Lt. Col M. Milutinović, **Radio Krajina** continues to be the only broadcaster in the RS operating beyond the iron grip of the SDS. Radio Krajina this week was unique in its balanced and informed coverage of Radovan Karadzic's "resignation" as president of the RS and its presentation of the municipal elections in Mostar was mainly fair. Until now, Radio Krajina has been the only broadcaster in the RS willing to offer significant time to opposition figures such as Miodrag Zivanovic, the Liberal Party leader.

The station, which operates inside Bosnian Serb army barracks and uses army recruits as its reporters, was also the only broadcaster to report on the RS-government take-over of SIM radio and television in Bijeljina and the sacking of its editors. Though Radio Krajina upholds certain RS shibboleths, such as a staunch defence of Gen. Mladic and constant references to "former B&H", it appears Col Milutinovic may be taking his orders from someplace other than Pale.

Radio Studio 99's "Hyde Park" phone-in was scheduled to discuss the Mostar election results on 4 July. Only one caller had been heard - complaining that the parties which won were the same ones which had produced the war - when the phones went dead. The presenter was ready, however, with appropriate music, including "Vraćam se tebi, seko" and Đorđe Balašević's "Krivi smo mi".

Letter

Dear Colleague,

We have received and read your Monitoring Report number 5 of 3 July. We must draw your attention to a significant fact which you failed to mention: namely, that Tuzla's independent Radio "Kameleon" made its own contribution to coverage of the Mostar elections. On Saturday (29 June) we were advised by the Soros Media Centre in Sarajevo that they had secured the means for us, as an independent radio station in Tuzla, to link up with Radio Mostar's programmes.

They also informed us at the same time that we would be able to take advantage of this facility until Tuesday, 2 July. Already, on Sunday, we rebroadcast Radio Mostar's election-day call-in programme from 17.00 to 18.00. On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday we took their main newscast at 16.00. During this same period we provided extensive information about the Mostar elections for Tuzla residents and invited people from Mostar to return to vote.

Therefore, at least as far as we were concerned, Mostar was not "somewhere far away". We find ourselves in times when true information means more than it once did. We think we ought not need to point this out to you, and that you should be professional enough to check your facts. Unfortunately, you have made a mistake on this occasion which we would request you to correct.

Konstantin Jovanović
Producer, Radio "Kameleon"

Tuzla, 4 July 1996

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